Regional Foster Placements
“Sharing the Caring”

Panel Member’s Guide
INTRODUCTION

The membership requirements, terms of reference and functions of fostering panels are set out in The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2003.

Fostering Panels play a very important quality assurance role providing objectivity and having the ability to challenge practice that is felt to fall short of the regulations or national minimum standards, or not to be in the interests of children, they bring a degree of independence from the Agency and cannot make decisions themselves, but rather make recommendations that the Agency decision maker must take into account. They are also required to give regular feedback to the Agency.

THE FUNCTION OF THE FOSTERING PANEL

The functions of the fostering Panel in respect of cases referred to it by the Agency are:

- To consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a foster carer.
- To recommend the terms on which the approval is given, for example, as to the numbers and ages of the children, whether the approval relates to any particular named child, or to any particular type of placement.
- To consider the first review of newly approved foster carers and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the Agency, and recommend whether or not they remain suitable to act as foster carers and if the terms of the approval remain appropriate.
- To monitor and advise on the procedures for undertaking reviews of foster carers.
- To oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the Agency.
- To give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or individual cases as the Agency may refer to it.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Fostering Panel shall consist of no more than ten members including the Chairperson.

Each Panel member will have experience/expertise which will enhance the decision making process.

The Agency will endeavour to ensure that there are representatives on the Panel from the following backgrounds:

- Someone who has recent experience in the child care field, e.g. a social worker with experience of working with children who are Looked After away from their family; experience of child protection issues, the appropriate legislation and
contact issues

- Someone who has experience of working with foster carers
- An independent Foster Carer
- An independent person with direct experience of foster care
- An independent person with, as far as possible, experience in Health
- An independent person with, as far as possible, experience in Education
- A representative of the community.

The panel is chaired by an independent person appointed by Regional Foster Placements. In the absence of the Chair the vice chair should deputise.

**Chair**

To ensure that the Foster Panel is not unduly influenced by the Agency the Panel Chair must be an independent person. This means that they cannot carry out any work for the Agency other than in connection with the Foster Panel.

“The Chair must have knowledge and ability to chair a complex meeting where a wide variety of views may be expressed. He or she should be able to lead a meeting with diplomacy and authority.

He or she must have sensitive regard to a fair and transparent process for foster carers whilst ensuring that the Panel keeps children’s welfare paramount”.

The chair has responsibility for:

- Deciding who will attend the Panel, in addition to Panel members
- Ensuring that all Panel members participate fully and that, if possible, a consensus is reached
- Conducting an annual appraisal of Panel members performance according to agreed objectives
- Involvement when a Panel member declares an interest in a case
- Involvement in deciding when a matter is urgent and when an additional Panel may need to be convened
- Contributing to training for Panel members and on-going review to ensure the continuing effectiveness of the Panel.
- Ensuring that Panel’s recommendations are clearly recorded along with the reasons for those recommendations.

*BAAF Fostering panels guidance for local authorities, fostering agencies and panel members in Wales.*

**Vice Chair**
The role of the Vice Chair is to deputise for the Chair in their absence, therefore they must have the ability to undertake the same responsibilities as the Chair.

**Social work representatives**

Fostering Regulations in Wales require that a social worker from the agency must be a member on the fostering panel. The social work member must have relevant experience either in fostering services or child care services.

**Medical Advice**

There is no requirement for a medical advisor to sit on the Panel however; the Panel must have access to medical advice as necessary.

**Legal Advice**

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**Panel Administrator**

The Panel Administrator ensures the smooth running of the Panel, takes minutes, liaises closely with the Panel Chair regarding the agenda and other matters and ensures the Panel will be quorate.

**Observers**

Occasionally other social workers, new Panel Members and allied professionals may attend to observe the Panel. A maximum of two observers may attend at any one time and the Chair’s agreement needs to be sought prior to attendance of said observers. Observers should sign a confidentiality statement. Foster carers whose cases are being discussed should also be in agreement with the presence of observers.

**QUORUM**

For the Foster Panel to meet and carry out its functions at least five members must be present; this must include either the Chair or Vice Chair and a Social Worker from the agency and an independent member.

If the Chair is not in attendance in a particular Panel and the Vice Chair does not have independent status then at least one other panel member must be an independent person.

To ensure that the Agency is able to carry out its functions and that the Foster Panel is able to work effectively Panel Members must be committed to attending meetings and
be proactive in communicating with the Panel Administrator and Chair regarding any issues which may affect their attendance.

**APPOINTMENT TO PANEL**

Members must undergo Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, other authority and reference checks prior to appointment to a Foster Panel.

**FOSTERING PANEL MEMBER—PERSON SPECIFICATION**

- Must have a reasonable understanding of child care issues
- Must be able to communicate their thoughts effectively within the Panel
- Must have an understanding of family dynamics and their effects on children
- Must be able to work in a non-discriminatory way and have an understanding of cultural diversity
- Must be able to demonstrate objectivity when making recommendations
- Must be committed to the work of and attendance at the Panel
- Must have an appropriate understanding of relevant legislation
- Must be committed to participating in occasional Panel Development days and recognise their own developmental needs around the work of the Panel
- Must have an awareness of how carer assessments are made and the various techniques used in the assessment process
- Must understand and demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the confidentiality of the Panel business.

**FOSTERING PANEL MEMBER – JOB DESCRIPTION**

- To read the circulated papers carefully before the meeting and to attend the meeting prepared to raise issues and to contribute to the panel discussion
- To take responsibility for participating in the making of a recommendation, on each case, drawing on both personal and professional knowledge and experience.
- To attend at least 75 per cent of meeting of the panel
- To be prepared to attend additional panels if possible, if requested
- To participate, with other panel members, in advising on policy and procedural matters as required
- To address diversity issues and promote anti-discriminatory practice
- To safeguard the confidentiality of all panel papers and panel discussions
- To participate in panel induction and in panel training, which will be at least one day per year
- To participate constructively in the annual review of their performance.”

*BAAF Fostering panels guidance for local authorities, fostering agencies and panel members in Wales.*
TERMS & CONDITIONS FOR PANEL MEMBERS

The regulations specify a limit of time that a panel member can serve on panel. The total number of years a panel member may remain on panel is 9 years. Each term of office is for 3 years and a member can renew their tenure up to three times i.e. 9 years.

Any Panel Member may resign office at any time by giving one month’s notice in writing to the Fostering Service Provider.

Each Panel Member’s performance will be reviewed annually in accordance with the job description and person specification guidelines for Panel Members.

A senior manager within Regional Foster Placements will review the Chair’s performance. The appraisal of all other Panel Members will be carried out by the Chair. If it is identified that a Panel Member is not meeting the required objectives this will be promptly discussed with the Panel Member with the aim of addressing any issues through advice and training.

If however, the Panel Member's performance remains below the required standards, notice will be given in writing that their services are no longer required and the reason for this decision.

On appointment, Panel Members will be required to sign an agreement with the Agency. This will set out the requirements for maintaining confidentiality and all other matters included within this document.

PRE-PANEL

Panel Members should receive the assessment reports for foster carers seeking approval at least 5 working days prior to the date of the Panel meeting, however, this is the minimum requirement and under normal circumstances Panel Members should expect to receive information 10 working days prior.

These forms are confidential and the information within them is subject to the Data Protection Act.

It is expected that Panel Members will have read these reports before the Panel meeting and noted any questions that they wish to ask or any points that they would like clarified.

PANEL MEMBERS RESPONSIBILITIES

“The Panel’s role is to examine the assessment report and to consider whether there is evidence of an applicant’s abilities and suitability to foster. Before making recommendations to the fostering Agency, essential questions for Panel members should include the following:
- Have the statutory checks been undertaken and are these satisfactory?
- Have at least two personal referees been interviewed and written reports of interviews provided? Do the referees adequately cover both applicants, if a couple? Have they known the family over a number of years? Should more referees be taken up, including from a family member?
- If the applicant was previously married or in a long-term significant relationship, has a reference been taken up from the ex-partner? If not, why not?
- Have the applicant’s own children by birth and any other children permanently in the household been interviewed? If not, why not?
- Has a chronology of the applicant’s life been provided? Is there sufficient independent verification of the applicant’s chronology and any self-reported information?
- Does the report include an analysis of the information provided by the assessing social worker with clear recommendations of the range and terms of approval?
- Has sufficient evidence of all the necessary competences been provided?
- Have areas for future development and support been identified?
- Does the applicant provide evidence of anti-discriminatory and anti-racist approaches to parenting?
- For an application to foster a disabled child, have the particular issues in relation to caring for a disabled child been addressed?
- Do the terms of approval appear appropriate given the assessed abilities of the prospective foster carer(s), the suitability of the household and the needs of the children in the age group recommended?”

THE PANEL MEETING

Panel Members will have an opportunity to discuss the reports, and agree on the information they require, before meeting with the assessing social worker and the foster carers.

The information sought will relate to seeking support for the social workers recommendation and will be relevant to ensuring that the applicant is fully able to provide all the necessary support and care for a child placed with them.

The primary task is to ensure that the child’s health, safety and welfare are paramount when the decision to approve the applicant is made.

Once the questions have been answered the assessing social worker and foster carers will leave the meeting room giving Panel Members an opportunity to discuss their recommendations for approval and the terms of approval.

The Panel can do one of three things:

- It can make a positive recommendation
- It can make a negative recommendation
- It can defer making a recommendation in order for further information to be made
In reaching recommendations, during the Panel meeting, Panel Members will need to discuss the strengths and concerns, if any, of the matters put before them. Good practice would suggest that Panel members try to reach a consensus on the recommendation. All Panel Members should be asked for their views. The recommendations should then be clearly recorded with given reasons for the recommendation and any areas of disagreement amongst Panel Members. It is good practice for the Chair to summarise the reasons for the recommendation during the Panel meeting. Panel Members should be asked to contribute to this.

However, there may be occasions when the panel agrees that it is not possible to reach a recommendation, in such circumstances the reasons for this need to be recorded along with the further information required by the Panel and any other action necessary in order to be in a position to reach a recommendation.

The recommendations of the Panel must be added to the assessment reports and signed by the Panel Chair.

**POST- PANEL**

Following the Panel meeting the Panel Administrator will draft the minutes of the Panel including the recommendations of the meeting and the reasons given.

Draft minutes will be sent to the Panel Chair within 5 working days of the Panel meeting.

All recommendations will be sent to the Agency Decision Maker within 5 days of the Panel meeting. The Decision Maker will either confirm the recommendation or make a different decision within 48 hours of receiving the information.

Prospective/Foster Carers will be verbally informed of Agency Decision Maker's decision within 2 days and they will receive written confirmation within 5 working days.

**PANEL MEMBER ALLOWANCE**

Panel Chair - £200 - £300
Panel Members - £180 - £200
I have read the Panel Members Guide and agree to work in accordance with the guidelines contained therein.

Name:.................................................................

Signed:..............................................................

Date:...............................................................